



# CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

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WASHINGTON REPORT  
by HENRY A. WAXMAN  
Congressman, 24th District

July 22, 1981

## SOVIETS LACK COMMON DECENCY

Three years ago on a visit to the Soviet Union, my wife, Janet, and I met Judith and Alexander Lerner. The Lerner's were among a number of Jewish refuseniks who had gathered to meet with us. I remember well Judith Lerner's fearlessness, intensity and optimism. She believed that somehow eventually she would settle in Israel. Two weeks ago Judith Lerner died. Her deathbed wish was that she be buried in Israel.

The Lerner family is prominent in Soviet academic and political affairs. Judith Lerner's husband, Alexander, is a world-famous mathematician, and a leader of the intellectual wing of Soviet Jewish activists. After his wife's death, he had no trouble making direct contact with Konstantin I. Zotov, the powerful head of the Soviet visa office OVIR. OVIR has jurisdiction over the movement of both Soviet and non-Soviet citizens in and out of the Soviet Union and within its borders.

Zotov was coldly indifferent to Lerner's impassioned plea. In fact, he simply refused his requests without explanation or clarification of any kind.

The interference by the Soviets with Judith Lerner's last rites did not end with the refusal to allow the body to leave the country. The authorities had also to deal with the request of the Lerner's daughter, Sofia Lerner Levin, that she be allowed to enter the USSR for the funeral, and to leave immediately after for her home in Israel.

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To the surprise of some among the Lerner family and friends, Sofia's request was granted. However, the "kind and compassionate" decision came with strings attached. The Russians demanded the funeral not be turned into a "political demonstration". This meant that most of Judith's closest friends -- activists and refuseniks -- who had struggled and suffered with her for years would not be able to attend. In fact, the Soviets had dictated the time, place, manner, and guest list for Judith Lerner's funeral.

In a beautifully-written account of Judith Lerner's death, Los Angeles Times staff writer, Robert Gillette, recounted the details of the burial itself.

On reaching the cemetery the tiny band of mourners discovered that there were no plots in the old Jewish cemetery. It was necessary to bury Judith Lerner in the Eastern Orthodox cemetery where nearly every grave is marked with a cross.

Gillette overheard an old Russian woman observing the Jewish funeral service remarking to her friend, "Look, what a shame, here in the Russian section!"

Obviously the folk anti-Semitism which infected the Russian people long before the Bolshevik Revolution, has not yet disappeared. In some respects the official anti-Semitism of the regime is but an extension of the classical anti-Semitism which produced so many pogroms over the centuries.

Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union is now at a low point. Soviet Jews are neither allowed to leave nor to live as Jews in their homeland. How heartbreaking to contemplate the fact that the Lerner family and the Moscow refusenik community are now hoping that the authorities will at some point allow Judith Lerner's body to be disinterred for reburial in Israel. The power of the monstrous Soviet state begins before birth and does not end even after death.

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